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Ambition and Luxury

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Ambition and Luxury

a

Poetical Epistle

By

William Richardson.

1778

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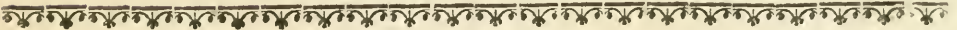
1877

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AMBITION AND LUXURY,

A

POETICAL EPISTLE.



A M B I T I O N

A N D

L U X U R Y,

A

P O E T I C A L E P I S T L E.

B Y

WILLIAM RICHARDSON, A. M.

Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow.

E D I N B U R G H:

Printed for WILLIAM CREECH;

A N D

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M,DCC,LXXVIII.

E R R A T A.

Line 63. *for golden read* radiant.

78. *for departed read* subjected.

156. *for the read* his.

395. *instead of the full point,* a point of interrogation.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE following Epistle was written a few years ago. Since that time it has received considerable corrections. By this, however, the Author by no means insinuates that it has received all the corrections necessary. On the contrary, ever since part of it has been printed, he has observed some things in the structure, and in the versification, which perhaps might require amendment. He has not, indeed, made any material changes in consequence of this, convinced that an author, especially on the eve of publication, is not a proper judge of what he has himself written. He submits the whole, therefore, with great deference, to the judgment of the Public. For, after all, he may be charged, perhaps, with bestowing more pains on these verses than any thought they convey, or any images they present, deserve.—Though, in the Poetical Epistle, a digressive manner of writing may be justified by examples of great authority; yet, in the most desultory, there ought to be unity of subject, and a connection, more or less intimate, between all the parts. Lest these qualities should not be so immediately apparent in the following Poem as the Author could wish, he has taken the liberty of offering his readers an Argument, shewing the general design, and the connection subsisting between the different illustrations and digressions.

A

ARGUMENT.

A R G U M E N T.

LINE 1.—8. The Introduction, containing an address to a young Nobleman engaged in the study of history.

Line 9.—42. History, being chiefly an account of the calamities of mankind, arising from unruly passions, becomes improving, if, by the mournful views it exhibits, we feel indignation and pity; and if, by the influence of these emotions, for feeling alone does not constitute virtue, we are rendered so watchful over our own conduct, as to impose restraint on impetuous passions.

Line 43.—96. Among the passions occasioning the overthrow of states, and the misery of mankind, Ambition, i. e. the love of fame in a perverted state, requires particular attention. Violent in its career, it produces war, and the destruction of the human race. Success and victory, in the struggles occasioned by Ambition, produce ease and the love of pleasure. Of this situation, and of this principle, the immediate consequences are luxury and the debasement of the human mind.

Line 97.—116. Ambition and Luxury compared; with an affirmation

affirmation that the latter is more pernicious to mankind than the former.

Line 117.—148. First proof of the affirmation, by a description of the conduct and effects of Ambition. How dreadful soever the calamities it occasions, they are not of long duration.

Line 149.—221. Second proof, by an illustration of the conduct of Luxury, and of its effects in producing profligacy and diseases. The evils it occasions are lasting, and without interruption.

Line 222.—295. The Author, justified and excited by the above illustration and description, indulges a digression, shewing, in a particular manner, the evils arising from an ungoverned desire of pleasure, first in the character of a young man abandoned to a habit of dissoluteness; and, secondly, by contrasting the foregoing description with the character of a young man persevering with spirit in a course of becoming conduct.

Line 296.—341. The comparison between the effects of Luxury and Ambition reassumed; and the affirmation, that Lu-
xury

luxury is the most pernicious, illustrated by the downfall of the states of Athens and of Rome. Though Ambition and the love of rapine may be immediate causes of the fall of states ; though these passions incited Philip in his invasion of Greece, and the northern nations in their attack on the Roman empire ; yet neither the Macedonians nor the Goths could have vanquished Athens and Rome, had not the spirit of these states been already broken, and had not the love of Pleasure rendered them the prey of their assailants.

Line 342.—422. The assertion that Luxury is more destructive than Ambition again advanced, as having received force and evidence from the foregoing observations ; with reflections suggested by the subject on the happiness men enjoyed before they were corrupted by luxury.

Line 428.—455. The Conclusion, containing a repetition of the practical admonition suggested at the beginning of the Epistle, and now justified by the foregoing illustrations.

AMBITION AND LUXURY,

A

POETICAL EPISTLE.



WHILE I in groves and wild recesses stray,
Indulging carelessly the rural lay ;
You, deeply studious, from th' historic page
Gather th' experience of a former age ;
Trace in their progress the revolving fates ;
The rise and downfall of departed states ;
Observe the deeds of gallant chiefs ; and learn
The path of wisdom timely to discern.

B

Vivid

Vivid in fancy's living ray, behold
 The pictur'd rillue of our woes unroll'd. 10
 Unfolding gradual, in funereal dyes,
 What awful images of guilt arise !
 The fell conspiracy ! the tyrant's car
 Rolling in triumph thro' the waste of war !
 Cities the prey of persecuting ire ! 15
 White harvests blazing in a field of fire !
 The flaming pile for chiefs in battle slain !
 Fair Freedom weeping o'er the galling chain !
 And Virtue flying with dishevell'd hair,
 Thro' lurid desarts from the tyger Care ! 20
 While you behold, dread engines of the Fates,
 Foul passions operate the fall of states ;
 And stain'd with Melancholy's sable dyes,
 Atrocious images of guilt arise ;
 May tears of sorrow and compassion flow ! 25
 Your soul with gen'rous indignation glow !
 Nor let the feeling fruitlessly decay,
 Transient as blushes of the dawning day :
 But the coy visitant, with zeal, arrest ;
 Nor let the seraph leave your soul unblest. 30
 Warm'd

Warm'd with ecstasie flame, with homage due,
 Vow to fair Virtue, love and fealty true :
 Vow, spite of perils, dauntless to maintain
 The rights and honours of her equal reign :
 And thus resolv'd, with constancy oppose 35
 The machinations of her vengeful foes.
 To others candid, nor inclin'd to blame
 Their seeming negligence of honest fame,
 Be to yourself severe ; endeavour still
 To rule the motions of a wayward will : 40
 In your own bosom labour to suppress
 The foes of virtue, passions in excess.

Th' imperious inmates of the human breast,
 Fierce as when tempests, on the wat'ry waste,
 Confound the elements ; with hideous roar 45
 Heave the swoln surge, and shake th' astonish'd shore ;
 Imperious passions are the constant cause
 Of ruin'd nations, or of trampled laws.
 And flaming fiercest of th' outrageous crew,
 A snaky fury of infernal hue, 50
 Ambition, parent of impetuous war,
 Lashes the courfers of her iron car ;

Drives

Drives them relentless to th' embattled field ;
 Yells in the van, and shakes her gleaming shield :
 Her with foul havoc fated, and elate, 55
 Victory follows in triumphant state ;
 And in the frenzy of audacious pride,
 Would drag reluctant Justice to his side ;
 Would, with the tone of insolent demand,
 Wrest the decisive balance from her hand. 60
 Justice, abhorrent, with disdainful eye,
 Rebukes the pageant ; thro' his hazy sky,
 On golden wing, speeds her illumin'd way
 To planets vested in the robes of day.
 There Freedom, cloth'd with beaming beauty, sings 65
 Her heroes, and their scorn of guilty kings ;
 In holy union with th' exulting choir
 Of Virtues, modulates the melting lyre ;
 Or in the bosom of a lovely dell,
 Leans by the margin of that living well, 70
 Whence streams of ecstasy forever flow ;
 Nor heeds the pageantries and pomps below.
 Proud Victory below, with laurel crown'd,
 Sweeps, with his flowing pall, th' empurpled ground.

See

See him ascending his triumphal car ! 75
 Before him captives, and the spoils of war ;
 Fall'n Kings lamenting their malignant fates ;
 Emblems and idols of departed states :
 And, as the slow procession moves along,
 The air re-echos with th' applauding song. 80
 See him, with conscious dignity, advance !
 Music attends him and the festive dance ;
 Profuse of fame, in prostituted verse,
 Surrounding minstrels his exploits rehearse ;
 While armies following, in superb array, 85
 With hoary elders, join the venal lay.
 And now alluring as the vernal gale
 Wafting the fragrance of a spicy dale,
 The voice of pleasure, warbling in the breeze,
 Leads him unwary to the vale of ease.—— 90
 There, while the banquet, and the tuneful lyre,
 Yield him gay pastime, and inflame desire,
 The blasted laurel on his brow decays,
 And soon he loses even the love of praise ;
 Lux'ry allures him to the lewd embrace, 95
 And weds the conqueror to foul disgrace.

Ambition ! Luxury ! pernicious pair !
 Ye spoil us, and our ravish'd honours share.
 Children of vengeance ! your united aim
 To sling with anguish, or to blast with shame ! 100
 The same your purpose ! but a diff'rent course
 Ye follow ; nor exert an equal force.—
 Ambition riots with impetuous rage,
 Whelms in a day th' improvements of an age ;
 Scorns the slow progress of seducing arts ; 105
 And flames a fury arm'd with fiery darts.
 But Lux'ry, disciplin'd in slyen guile,
 With honey'd accent and the dimpling smile,
 Or with th' enticement of the tuneful lay,
 Soothes to delude, and flatters to betray. 110
 Won by th' allurements of her gay decoys,
 More of mankind her hollow smile destroys ;
 More than Ambition ; tho' the fiends of fate,
 Rapine and War, in bloody armour wait,
 Ready to execute her dire behest, 115
 Lance the red light'ning, and lay nations waste.

To weigh their merits, with discerning care,
 Their various conduct, and effects, compare.

By

By judgment guided, let the keen-ey'd maid,
 Fair Fancy, lend thee her enlight'ning aid : 120
 Chaste in design, in execution bold,
 She will their features and their forms unfold.
 Observe attentive, fleeting as they pass,
 The phantoms shifting in her magic glafs.

Observe Ambition ! Now the hosts engage : 125
 Furious she animates their headlong rage.
 See ! livid light'ning flashes from her eyes ;
 The rav'ning hell-hounds by her side arise :
 Her voice with th' uproar of the fight ascends,
 And, swelling, to the arch of heaven extends. 130
 Who can the tumult and the strife pourtray,
 The rout and havoc of her wasteful way ?
 Onward she rages with infuriate speed :
 Moaning around, unpitied victims bleed :
 Reeking with ruddy gore the torrents flow ; 135
 And grim she triumphs in the scene of woe.
 Yet shall the gloom of this tempestuous sky
 Yield to the day-spring of returning joy :
 Calm'd by the radiance and the smile of peace,
 Th' impetuous fury of the storm shall cease. 140

Hail,

Hail, lovely Peace ! before thy golden ray
 'The clouds divide ; the fullen shades decay :
 Chas'd by th' effulgence of thy shooting beam
 The daemons vanish with a dreary scream :
 The fields are gladden'd ; hill and dale prolong 145
 The liquid music of the silvan song.
 Lovely thy beam ! and long thy genial light
 Shall yield us seasons of serene delight.

Now, softly smiling, with enticement sweet,
 Pleasure allures us to her gay retreat ; 150
 Th' enchanted maze, far from Reflection's cell,
 Where noise, and revelry, and riot dwell.
 And, shall we follow to observe her there,
 Leading her orgies to the den of Care ;
 While couching low, the glaring savage lies 155
 To spring impetuous on the giddy prize ?
 Ah no ! retir'd on Contemplation's hill,
 View from afar the progress of her skill.

Oft in the wilds on Ætna's swelling side,
 Wak'd premature in unsuspecting pride, 160
 By

By fires unseen, that underneath them glow,
 Blossoms, before th' appointed season, blow ;
 Nor wait till spring, with showers and gentle gales,
 Restore soft verdure to the hills and dales.
 The wand'ring peasant, with amazement, views
 The glade adorn'd with unexpected hues ; 165
 The Genius of the gay retreat reveres ;
 With holy awe the grassy altar rears ;
 Pours out libations ; offers fruits and flowers ;
 And seeks repose in the devoted bowers.
 Unwary stranger ! the foundations shake ! 170
 The prison'd fires from bursting caverns break :
 The mountain bellows ; pitchy columns rise ;
 And light'nings flash, and flames assail the skies :
 Sicilia labours with convulsive throes ;
 The mountain yawns ; the molten torrent flows ; 175
 Pours down a fiery deluge, and devours
 The blazing forest and devoted bowers.
 The bowers of Pleasure perish even like these !
 While Ruin desolates the vale of Ease ;
 Gnashes his iron teeth ; flings to the ground 180
 The goblet, with the festal garland crown'd ;

D

Scatters

Scatters the screaming bevy ; headlong guides
 The fiery progress of sulphureous tides ;
 And, with a giant arm, tears from the sky,
 The gilded ensign of illicit joy. 185

Insidious Pleasure ! thy seducing art
 The head inebriates, and corrupts the heart ;
 Tunefully modulates the melting strain,
 Kindling wild frenzy in the fever'd vein ;
 Paints airy visions, that, with gay delight, 190
 Impose illusion on the ravish'd sight :
 And, by the power of thine alluring air,
 Thine eyes that languish, and thy bosom bare,
 Thy features redd'ning, while affecting shame,
 They spread th' infection of a pois'nous flame, 195
 Thy painful bondage and thy spells degrade
 The fetter'd spirit by thy smile betray'd.
 And soon, Diseases, an inhuman train,
 Begin the horrors of their baneful reign.
 With mortal anguish, and corroding stings, 200
 Vice fills their quivers, imps their footy wings,
 And guides the path of their unerring power
 Thro' glooms congenial that around them lour.

Shiv'rings,

Shiv'rings, and languishment, and anxious fear
 Wave their pale banner, and announce them near ; 205
 I feel their symptoms, while of lurid hue
 The conscious air sheds her unwholesome dew !
 I hear them panting ! and, swift-shooting nigh,
 I trace their arrows in the sickly sky.
 Wailing attends them, and the moan suppress'd 210
 That heaves reluctant in the pining breast.—
 Now see them eying, with infectious glare,
 Their victim tossing on the bed of care :
 See, from his weary eyes, they banish Sleep,
 Soft power ; and doom his weary eyes to weep. 215
 With fiery breath vent their envenom'd steams ;
 Whet their fell talons dipp'd in Stygian streams ;
 And grinning ghastly, while they mock his pains,
 Tear the frail texture of his burning veins.
 Come, kindly Death ! more kindly far than they, 220
 And draw the curtain on the loathsome clay.

The powerful faculties, by heav'n design'd
 To raise, adorn, and dignify the mind,
 With every virtue of the gen'rous soul,
 Fly the foul revel, and th' intemp'rate bowl : 225
 They,

They, with the sifter of ingenuous shame,
Fair Health, abandon the polluted frame.

See the loath'd victim of disease and scorn
Crawling in early life, despis'd, forlorn !
His roseat hues reluctantly decay ; 230
Spirit subsides, and vigour wastes away.
Where now th' exertions of high-minded youth ?
Th' inventive energy ? the love of truth ?
The eager longing for an early name ?
And pre-conceptions of immortal fame ? 235
Evaporated, lost, they leave behind
The vapid dregs of a degraded mind.
And yet some feelings of his state remain,
That lead him thral'd to counterfeit disdain ;
Bafely to counterfeit contempt of praise, 240
Sland'ring th' avowal of his better days.
Disease and sorrow in his bowels burn ;
These the requital of unseemly scorn !
His trembling nerves, and every spring of life
Decay, unequal to th' inglorious strife : 245
And soon the parent, o'er th' untimely bier,
Shall pour the tribute of a genuine tear :

The

The boon companions feel some grief of heart,
 That boon companions should too soon depart ;
 Attend his obsequies ; and, for a day, 250
 Seem sad, and solemn ; peradventure pray !
 Renounce their pleasures—for a day ; and then,
 Live, while they live, the life of happy men.

Glowing with genius and improv'd desires,
 Is there a youth whom love of fame inspires ? 255
 Him let no maxim of the loose and vain
 Seduce to mingle in gay Folly's train :
 Him let no taunting ridicule dismay
 From holding stedfastly his onward way.
 Tho' Folly scoff at him, or Envy leer, 260
 The wise esteem him, and the good revere :
 On him, the stay of a declining state,
 The expectations of mankind await :
 Glory awaits him ; and effulgent praise
 Shall gild the fulness of his rip'ning days. 265
 These the rewards of virtue ! and for these
 He scorns th' allurements of ignoble ease :
 Still perseveres ; nor will his spirit fail
 Tho' fortune swell not his adventurous fail,

Or on his early lot perversely frown ; 270
 Still perseveres ; and shall obtain renown.——
 In days of folly, in a froward age,
 Fever'd with riot, and amusement's rage,
 Too gay for study, and too proud for toil,
 See high-birth batt'ning in Preferment's foil : 275
 Elate with Vanity's uplifting fumes,
 See Wealth exulting in his recent plumes !
 And while the whirlwinds in their caverns sleep,
 The burnish'd vessel, fearless of the deep,
 Her streamers playing with the sportive breeze, 280
 Floats on the surface of fallacious seas.
 But darkness gathers, and the tempests lour !
 Where now the minions of high place and power ?
 They reel confounded, and they stare aghast,
 Bluster, and wish—these troublous times were past ; 285
 Make aukward efforts ; what can they do more ?
 Leap from the helm, and paddle to the shore.
 Then, spite of prejudice, in fortune's spite,
 Merit emerges from the shades of night,
 Flames like the day-star in the morning sky, 290
 Disperfes tumult, and diffuseth joy.

So

So Pit arofe ; and fhould my faithful rhymes,
 Sav'd from oblivion, live in future times,
 To future times they boldly would proclaim
 Pit the defender of Britannia's fame *. 295

Obferve th' Athenian, or the Roman ftate,
 And trace the progrefs of their downward fate.
 Rouz'd by Ambition, furious from the north,
 The Macedonian Vulture iffu'd forth.
 Ambition wing'd him for the vent'rous flight, 300
 And fir'd his fpirit in the bloody fight,
 Till fierce inflam'd, on Cheronaea's field,
 He faw th' Athenian to his prowefs yield.
 Urg'd by the love of rapine, from afar
 The blue-ey'd Vandal drove the ftorm of war, 305
 Delug'd the western continent, defy'd
 The Roman legions, and o'erwhelm'd their pride.
 Yet, long before the Macedonian came
 To blaft the glory of th' Athenian name,
 The field was fought, the battle loft and won, 310
 Athens was fall'n, her race of glory run !
 Her

* Alluding to a memorable period in the hiftory of Great Britain, commencing with the year one thoufand feven hundred and fifty-fix.

Her Genius saw her rebel to the sway
 Of Wisdom, and indignant soar'd away !
 Th' enlighten'd Genius, whose intrepid sword
 Baffl'd the fury of the Persian Lord, 315
 Vanquish'd the myriads of his swarming host,
 And drench'd with gore the Asiatic coast.
 Ah ! long before the Macedonian arms
 Rang in the north, and scatter'd dire alarms,
 Athens was abject : Luxury had spread 320
 Her deadly poison to the heart and head :
 Instead of wisdom and the love of fame,
 Seducing Pleasure, with unhallow'd flame,
 Rul'd unoppos'd, and, with audacious hand,
 Drove active Virtue from that honour'd land ; 325
 Honour'd of Freedom, and the tuneful train,
 Till Pleasure, even in Athens, forg'd the chain,
 The chain impos'd on that disastrous day
 When Philip triumph'd in his easy prey.
 No, not Ambition, nor the love of spoil 330
 Urging the Scythian ; but th' insidious toil
 Prepar'd by luxury, to dire disgrace,
 Betray'd the glory of the Roman race.

The

The love of rapine, or ambition, drew
 To fields of carnage the barbaric crew : 335
 Before the fury of their vengeful dart
 Fell the fair monuments of human art.
 But long before the rav'ning shaft was sped,
 Rome was enfeebled, and her spirit dead ;
 Else had they fall'n, as fell their lawless host, 340
 When Marius widow'd the Teutonic coast.

How few, alas ! by Honour's voice impell'd,
 From sloth awaken'd, and from vice with-held,
 Give genius exercise, exert their force,
 And persevere in a progressive course ! 345
 How few recover from the burning pain
 Of poison boiling in the fever'd vein ! ——
 Of minds infected who can tell the cure ?
 Or say to the polluted, be ye pure ?
 Pleasure that won them to the devious way, 350
 Will ne'er relinquish her devoted prey ;
 Nor healing balm into their wounds infuse ;
 Nor heed the pleading of the moral muse.
 Who can elicit from the tainted heart,
 The venom flowing from her ranc'rous dart ? 355

Or limitation on her power impose ?
 Or stem the torrent of succeeding woes ?
 Ambition storms like a devouring blast ;
 But soon the tempests of her rage are past.
 Her power, though savage, ceases in a day ; 360
 But Pleasure rules with unremitting sway.
 She reigns immortal, if she ever reign ;
 And binds her slaves in a despotic chain.
 Ah ! while they toil in unbecoming deeds,
 The victim hourly on her altar bleeds. 365

O for that Age by antient bards extoll'd ;
 That fabled age of unpolluted gold,
 When Virtue reign'd ; ere Luxury began
 To mingle potions for deluded man ;
 And strove, with arrogant design, to bind 370
 Ignoble fetters on the free-born mind !
 The pillar'd palace, the stupenduous dome,
 The carpet glowing from the Persian loom,
 The story'd ceiling, and the silken bed
 Were not : With lowly unambitious head, 375
 The cottage shelter'd by the green-wood's side,
 The want of palaces and pomp supply'd.

No

No bloating revel, no prolong'd repast,
 Pamp'ring the body, laid the spirit waste :
 Mankind in peaceful innocence, serene, 380
 Enjoy'd the produce of the sylvan scene.
 For them the brake with rip'ning berries glow'd,
 The wild bee murmur'd, and the fountain flow'd ;
 The goat climb'd hazardous the shaggy steep ;
 The green hill echo'd with their bleating sheep ; 385
 Gay was their morning ; and the sober even
 Heard their pure orisons ascend to heaven.
 While th' iron rigour of these later days
 Scoffs at the garland of poetic praise,
 That meed so pleasing to the good and fair, 390
 The wise and valiant of the times that were,
 With bold adventure shall my song engage,
 Fondly to celebrate that happy age,
 Fabled or true, of unpolluted gold,
 Sung in far loftier strain by those of old. 395
 Then Justice sojourn'd with mankind, and saw
 Their conduct guided by her equal law :
 By her invited, Truth of eagle eye,
 And Freedom, daughters of the radiant sky,

Both

Both crown'd with laurels of immortal fame, 400
 Glad of the summons, to her triumph came ;
 Nor fear'd lest vapours, with contagion vile,
 Should th' azure of their sky-weeds pure defile.
 Temp'rance came jovial to their banquet, made
 By the cool fountain of an upland shade ; 405
 And with him Health, a ruddy maiden, gay
 As morning blushing at the gate of day.
 The while Simplicity, their genial board,
 Blyth shepherdes, with mellow fruitage stor'd,
 Peace blest'd the meeting ; and Contentment oft 410
 Smiling, delighted them with warblings soft :
 While ever and anon the vocal gale,
 Convey'd wild music from a distant dale,
 Where nymphs and shepherds, an exulting throng,
 Gave them high homage in the festal song. 415
 No flatt'ry then tun'd her deceitful lays :
 And I uncensur'd, might have sung your praise ;
 Sung, unsuspected of the courtier's art,
 The prepossessions of an ardent heart,
 That glows, my CATHCART, with a genuine flame, 420
 And longs to triumph in your perfect fame.

Meantime

Meantime for praise, let admonition find
 Easy admission to your candid mind :
 Nor scorn the travail of a muse that loves
 To roam excursive in fantastic groves ; 425
 If haply, by amusing, she may gain
 A patient audience to her moral strain.

As the bee labours in the tufted bowers,
 Glowing with Summer's odorif'rous flowers,
 Gathers the tribute of th' irriguous dell, 430
 And stores assiduously the waxen cell ;
 So from the scenes that to your fancy rise
 Gather the knowledge that will make you wise.
 ' While you behold, dread engines of the Fates,
 ' Foul passions operate the fall of states, 435
 ' And stain'd with Melancholy's fable dyes,
 ' Atrocious images of guilt arise :
 ' May tears of sorrow and compassion flow !
 ' Your soul with gen'rous indignation glow !
 ' Nor let the feeling fruitlessly decay, 440
 ' Transient as blushes of the dawning day ;
 ' But the coy visitant with zeal arrest,
 ' Nor let the seraph leave your soul unblest.

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‘ Warm’d with ecstasie flame, with homage due,
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